

Appl. No. 10/617,477
Amendment dated September 21, 2006
Reply to Office Action mailed June 30, 2006

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of this application in view of the foregoing amendments to the claims and the following comments.

In the Office Action dated June 30, 2006, claims 1, 3, 5, 7, 9-13, 22-26, and 28-39 were examined. Claims 1, 26, and 30 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b), as allegedly anticipated by U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2001/0030393 to Flannery (the "Flannery application"), and claims 1, 3, 5, 11-13, 24-26, and 28-30 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a), as allegedly obvious over the Flannery application in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,974,122 to Shaw. Applicants acknowledge with appreciation the indicated allowability of claims 7, 9, 10, and 31-40¹.

Applicants respectfully disagree with the Examiner's rejections of claims 3, 5, 11-13, 24-26, and 28-30. Nevertheless, to advance the prosecution of this application and thereby avoid further delays, Applicants have now canceled these rejected claims, without prejudice. Applicants intend to file a continuation application seeking claims comparable in scope to the claims canceled by this Amendment.

Thus, 13 claims are presented for reconsideration, including independent claim 7 and its dependent claims 9 and 10, and independent claim 31 and its dependent claims 32-40. All of claims 7, 9, 10, and 31-40 have been allowed.

Applicants wish to apprise the Examiner of the status of a related divisional patent application, Serial No. 10/916,703. The claims of that application currently stand rejected based on U.S. Patent No. 3,926,439 to Chao et al. and U.S. Patent No. 5,839,960 to Parra et al. Both patents already are of record in this present application.

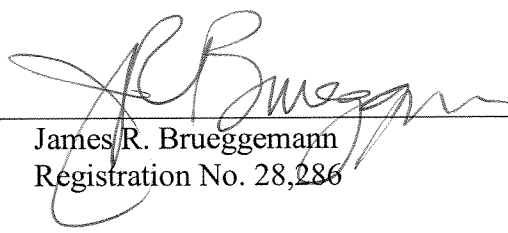
¹ The summary page of the Office Action indicated that claims 11-13 also had been allowed, but page 3 of the Office Action rejected those claims under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a).

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In view of the foregoing amendments to the claims, this application should now be in condition for allowance. Issuance of a notice of allowance is respectfully requested. If the Examiner believes that a further telephone conference with the Applicants' undersigned attorney might expedite the prosecution of this application, she is invited to call at the telephone number indicated below. Any additional fees due in connection with the filing of this Amendment should be charged to Deposit Account No. 19-1853.

Respectfully submitted,
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